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CHURCH GOVERNMENT,

A SPEECH

DELIVERED AT

CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND,

15th MARCH, 1852,

BY

JOHN ROBERT GODLEY.

PRIVATELY REPRINTED, 1899.

13, ENNISMORE GARDENS,

S. W.

28 April 99

My dear Talbot,

My mother, for purposes of her own, has had this speech reprinted: it was delivered, as you see, 47 years ago.

It may interest you, as it has interested me, to read

the utterances of a High
Churchman of that date,
a friend of Lord Lyttelton &
Mr. Gladstone, upon a subject
which has ^{recently} ~~recently~~ been much
discussed by a later
generation -

Yours very sincerely
Arthur Godley

Church Government.

Mr. Godley rose to propose the following resolution:—"That it is extremely desirable that some form of government for the Church of England in New Zealand, should be established with as little delay as possible." In doing so, he spoke as follows:—

The resolution which I have to propose is one which may be said to express a truism. The Church in New Zealand, as elsewhere, is a Society, having a definite mission and certain practical ends to accomplish. Its essential principle, the very condition of its existence, is work. To my mind the notion of an inactive or passive Church seems almost an absurdity. Indeed what I say of a Church applies more or less to every associated body. When men form or join a society, ecclesiastical or secular, the idea is almost necessarily involved of their doing something in combination, which, as individuals, they could not or would not do; otherwise why should they combine? But a society in order to work must have an organization and a government; it must have forms, laws, qualifications, executive instruments—it must have a head and hands. Accordingly, every association of men, for any purpose whatever, begins by constituting its government; however small or humble be its scale and its object, whether it be a penny club, or a building society, or a political union, or a religious sect, as a matter of course it appoints its managing committee, or its president, or its synod, or whatever else it may please to call its legislative and executive organ. Through the medium of this organ it acts, and speaks, and does its business; without this organ it would be an unmeaning and objectless list of names. Therefore I call it a truism to say, that it is exceedingly desirable for the Church of England in New Zealand to have a form of government. The wonder is indeed, that at this stage of our ecclesiastical existence we should have to enunciate so self-evident a proposition. Yet so it is; this truism is not merely ignored—it is actually disputed. While, so far as I can recollect, there is not in the world another instance of a society without a government, to many Englishmen it appears right and proper that such should be the normal state of their Church. If you go to the shareholder in a joint-stock bank or a railway company, or to a Wesleyan or

Presbyterian, and ask him how the society he belongs to is governed—that is to say who makes and who executes its laws—not one of them would be for a moment at a loss for an answer; he could inform you with respect to its organization as easily as he could with respect to its character and object. But if you go to a member of the Church of England and ask him the same simple question, what answer can he give? Is there any one here present who can tell me how the laws of the English Church are made—who speaks our collective voice—does what we have as a Corporation to do—in a word, who manages our affairs? One man may refer me to certain laws made in the year 1603 for the Government of the Church, and may reply to me by describing the judicial machinery provided for the execution of them. Another may tell me that Parliament governs the Church. Another that the Queen;—another that the Bishops govern it. And in each of these answers there would be a certain amount of apparent truth. The Canons are nominally the Statute Book of the English Church. Parliament does occasionally legislate in matters ecclesiastical. The Queen is, in theory, her executive head. The Bishops exercise, after a fashion, certain governmental functions in their respective dioceses. But still the question—“who governs us?” taken in its ordinary, common-sense meaning, remains unanswerable. The Canons are necessarily and properly for the most part obsolete and unexecuted: as indeed, it is absurd to suppose that any human authority could devise complicated rules of action for a society, which would answer its purposes and supply its needs for 250 years without addition and alteration. Parliamentary legislation in Church matters is a usurpation founded simply upon might. The Queen’s authority is as purely nominal in ecclesiastical as in civil affairs. The Bishops have no recognised collective authority at all; and in their respective dioceses exercise the simply ministerial office of carrying out the existing laws. No real governmental power resides in any of these functionaries: because a right to make laws is an essential attribute of a real Government; and no existing authority has a right to make laws for the English Church. In considering this state of things, I confess it seems to me difficult to resist the conclusion that even the endurance of it implies, in a degree, paralysis; contentment under it would imply the absence of life. A society that cannot make a law for the regulation of its own affairs, or express a corporate opinion, or do a cor-

porate act—that is unable in short to perform any of the functions of life—can only by a great stretch of language be said to be a living body. Whatever may be the numbers and energy of its individual members, as a society, I say, it is virtually dead. And, I confess, I see little hope that the Mother Church will be able to extricate herself from this anomalous and helpless condition. Parliament will never, I fear, concede to her, so long as she holds her present endowments and her present position, the liberty of independent action; and the Church, on the other hand, will not sacrifice her position and her endowments for the sake of her liberties. For, indeed, the disestablishment of the English Church would be, beyond all doubt, a fearful revolution, leading to consequences which no man can foresee; and if her children shrink from bidding for her freedom at such a price, I cannot wonder at them, and I dare not blame them. But fortunately our position here is a more hopeful one in reality, although at first sight it may seem to be the reverse.

The Church of England being in such a state as I have described, has sent out numerous bodies of offspring to all parts of the world; I beg your pardon; she cannot send, because as I have explained to you, as a Church she cannot do anything; I should have said, numerous bodies of her offspring have gone out from her, bearing with them the principles and traditions of their spiritual mother, and they have to adapt these as best they can, to a new set of political and social circumstances. Amongst other things they have to see how they can get on without government in a state of things which urgently requires corporate action. The Colonial Church is cast on her own resources altogether; she has, generally speaking, neither influence, nor friends, nor consideration bequeathed to her or provided for her ready made; she must obtain them as she can, by personal efforts, if I may use the term. But personal efforts require, of course, a personal agency; in order to collect funds to build churches, to get and keep congregations, to exercise order and discipline amongst them, and to convert the heathen, a machinery is wanted; the old machinery, such as it is, is inapplicable or inadequate, and there is no one with authority to create new. The consequence is, that the Anglican communion almost invariably falls, at the commencement of a colony, below the level of other denominations. I do not recollect a single instance when, under such circumstances, she can be said to have held her own. Other sects come out accustomed to

self-organization and self-government; each branch is complete in itself, prepared at all points, ready for its work. Anglicans alone, when removed from the sphere of their old associations, stand bewildered and apathetic, and unable to move or act; looking for help from government, or from the mother country; from every quarter, in fact, but from themselves. Though generally richer than other denominations, they cannot or will not support their own ministers; at least I know that in these colonies with which, alone, I am personally acquainted, it is so. In British America the English people through the society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and the additional Bishoprics' Society; and in New Zealand the people of England through the Church Missionary Society and Parliamentary grants, support the clerical establishments of communities which are perfectly well able to do it for themselves, and would be perfectly willing too, if they were not enervated by long disuse of the habit of acting for themselves in ecclesiastical affairs. At the same time it would be only fair to say that the Church of England in the colonies is far from being on a level with other sects, as regards freedom of action. Deprived as she is of the advantages resulting (or supposed to result) from state connexion, it is believed (for such is the absurdity of the system, that no one seems to know exactly what its principles or practices are,) but it is believed that she still remains fettered by the liabilities which were the incidents of her establishment in the mother country. I will illustrate what I mean by an example which occurred not long ago in this colony. A member of the Anglican Church wished to marry a Jewess; the clergyman refused to perform the marriage, and persevered in his refusal; but the bishop told me he had been informed by the judge, that if the parties applied for a mandamus to compel the clergyman to marry them, he (the judge,) would have felt it is duty to grant it. I am not going to enlarge on the intolerable tyranny involved in the existence of such a state of things; I allude to it at present as showing the necessity, not only for a complete review of our ecclesiastical affairs, and for the establishment of new and radically different principles of church organization, but also, perhaps, for parliamentary assistance in breaking our bonds.

I have now, Sir, attempted to show why in the words of the resolution which I am about to propose, it appears desirable that a form of Government for the Church of England in New Zealand should be established, with as little delay as

possible. I have attempted to explain that without it she cannot properly fulfil her most ordinary and necessary functions, and that to the want of it is mainly to be attributed the apathy and helplessness which have been to so great an extent characteristic of our colonial churches. I will next endeavour to corroborate the view I have taken by quoting the example set to us with respect to this matter by a sister Church which found itself not very long ago in circumstances analogous to our own. I mean the Protestant Episcopal Church of America. It is often said by enemies of the English Reformed Church that she is the creature of the state, dependent on her establishment and her endowments for existence, and incapable of standing, like other ecclesiastical bodies, humanly speaking, by her own strength, and working with her own means; and I confess if I were to look at the present state of our colonial churches alone, I should find it difficult to rebut the sneer. But I can show another side to the picture. I can prove, I think, that the converse view is near to the truth. When the United States declared their independence, it may be said (humanly speaking again) that the Church fell with the monarchy; episcopacy, especially in communion with the Church of England, was for obvious reasons, not only unfashionable, but almost infamous; the endowments of the Church, which had been very large in some of the States, were taken away; her edifices were destroyed; even her communion plate was sold; numbers of her clergy emigrated, together with the most earnest members of the flocks. In short, it is impossible to conceive a more complete and overwhelming prostration than the American Episcopal Church then suffered; one would have said that within the lifetime of a generation, her existence in the United States, like that of the British Constitution, on which she is said to depend, would be a matter of history. Now let us look at the sequel. For some little time the depression consequent on the revolution continued, but the American Churchmen who were left were not dismayed; they had sense to see that new measures were required to meet the emergency, and faith to believe that they would be sufficient to meet it. Now, it is instructive for us to remark that the first step they took when forced to shift for themselves, was the formation of a governing body. The first General Convention of the American Church met in 1785, only three years after the peace; the first American Bishop was consecrated in 1787. The Church was organized

with a rapidity and completeness eminently characteristic of the administrative talents of the people; the civil constitution of the Republic serving naturally to a great extent as a model. A General Convention was constituted consisting of all the Bishops, and of clerical and lay representatives from each diocese, and possessing full legislative powers for the whole Church. Diocesan conventions exercised similar powers within their respective jurisdictions. Vestries administered parishes. By degrees the outline thus sketched was filled up; canons of discipline were passed; the liturgy was revised; provision was made for education, for foreign missions, for domestic extension. Scattered and helpless individuals became an animated, active working body, far inferior indeed to most of the other demonstrations in outward circumstances, but at least able for the first time to do justice to itself and make free use of its own resources. Before I describe the result of these measures, I must remind you that the Episcopal Church had another disadvantage to contend with. It is notorious that, of the emigrants to America, a comparatively small proportion are even nominally members of the English Church. The causes of this are too obvious to require enumeration, and the fact is undoubted. The American Episcopal Church, therefore, was forced to rely largely upon proselytism, if it hoped to hold its own in numbers and influence. But to return to the historical facts. I cannot find out what the number of Episcopalian clergymen was after the revolution. I can only ascertain such isolated facts as that the State of New York, which in 1844 had 304 clergymen, had only five in 1787. I am compelled, therefore, to begin my general comparison at a later date. In 1814 I find that the Episcopal Church numbered 240 clergymen, officiating in organized parishes; in 1844, the last year for which I have been able to procure the statistics, it had 1202. Assuming that its congregations multiplied in equal proportion, and there seems no reason for doubting it, we have here the fact that in thirty years the number of American Churchmen increased five-fold, or about twice as fast as the whole population of the Union. So that even if we allow for argument's sake that immigration supplied them to an extent proportioned to their original numbers, they must have more than doubled themselves by conversions alone in thirty years. And that they have done so seems at least to be shewn by the fact that in 1839 more than one half of their Clergy, and nearly one half of their Bishops had been Presbyterians, Con-

gregationalists, Methodists, or Baptists. I need not say that the proportion of converts is likely to have been larger among the congregations than among those who rose to office and dignity in the Church. Again, the American Church gets plenty of money. Her Clergy, who now amount to at least 1600, have an average income of £200 a year, and if I add the funds raised for Church building, education, missions, and other Church purposes, I am sure I shall be within the mark if I set the income of the American Church at half a million sterling annually; that is, speaking roughly, 10s. a head for the members of her communion; or £2 10s for every family. "In fact, we do not want money," says her historian, "we have funds enough; we want men for the Ministry." This is the natural result of the zeal and interest which is engendered among her members by an active participation in the management of her affairs. But it is not only in subscribing money that this zeal and interest are displayed. Just as civil freedom promotes patriotism, so does ecclesiastical freedom promote that religious *esprit de corps*, which is one of the strongest human incentives to zeal for the interests of the Church. (I trust I may say this without seeming to disparage the higher and more spiritual motives on which every Christian should primarily act.) When I was in America I paid particular attention to this point; and I must say I was forcibly impressed by the zealous, indefatigable, and systematic manner in which the "Episcopalians" of that busy, restless, worldly nation carried on the business of their Church. In every department of her proceedings the advantages of her system are visible. When an extension of the Episcopate is required, she is not obliged to go, like some other people I have heard of, to a heterogeneous legislature composed of men of every religion, or of no religion, nor to a Colonial Minister, who may be her bitter enemy, in order to ask leave to consecrate a Bishop, and to discuss the boundaries of the Diocese, and the amount of the endowment. The American Church settles that for herself, as every church ought. But I need not expatiate longer on the advantages of system and organization which the American Church enjoys. I have been induced to say this much on her constitution and progress, because, as presenting the only instance of an ecclesiastical body in communion with the Church of England which possesses a regular constituted representative Government, she affords the only available precedent for our own case; and also because the signal success, which has

attended a career begun under such discouraging circumstances, seems to show that, in order to fulfil her mission, the Church of England does not require endowments or state connexion; she only wants to have her hands untied, a clear stage, and no favour. Mind, I do not by any means wish it to be understood that I propose the American Constitution, in all its parts, to you as a model; nor (of course) do I mean to assert that self-government is the only cause of the success of the American Church. But I must say it does appear, not only to be remarkably coincident with that success, but to constitute almost the only material difference between her position and that of the Colonial Churches which are so far behind her in available life and energy.

I will next notice one or two of the objections commonly made to a representative Government for the Church; for I need hardly say that the form of Government we wish to obtain involves the representative principle. It is said that it would encourage factions, debates, and party contests. I will not insist on the argument that a similar objection would lie against all representative Governments—civil as well as ecclesiastical. I would rather point to the American Church, and ask whether such an effect had been produced there. Of course, I do not mean to say that there has been no party feeling on Church matters in America. I only say it has not been so strong, nor has it led to such evil results, as in England; and that there, as elsewhere, in the Church, as in the State, free and regular institutions have been not the cause, but the cure of faction. Again, it may be said that Self-Government will lead to rash and heterodox alterations in the formularies of worship, and in the discipline of the Church. And here I must not be misunderstood. I would certainly claim, on the part of the New Zealand Church, the right of managing to the fullest extent its own affairs, including, of course, the regulation of worship and the control over formularies. While it is necessary and right that the formularies of the Church of England should be the basis of union among those who combine to form a Constitution for a colonial Church, I must say, that after it is formed, I think it would be unworthy of our position as a national Church to bind ourselves to these formularies for ever. Why should we not have the same right of revising from time to time our liturgies and articles to suit our circumstances, which every national Church, and which the Church of England herself, has repeatedly claimed and exercised? Are we

afraid we shall exercise that natural and obvious right badly ? It is possible we may. But I am quite sure, if we are inclined to do so, no paper restriction will prevent us. Nor is it advisable that it should. If Bishops, Clergy, and Laity should at any time wish for alterations, I really see no good in trying to make them use forms which they would on the hypothesis disapprove of. But having said thus much on the abstract right to effect changes, I point to the American Church as my ground for anticipating that they will not be effected ; at least not to any injurious extent. There was everything in the circumstances of the American Church and people to make wide deviations on their part from the English ritual, *a priori* probable ; yet it is well known that the deviations actually made are altogether unimportant, both in number and character ; nay, it is remarkable, and forms a strong testimony in favour of our formularies, that in several instances where alterations have been actually made, the Church has subsequently returned, after experience of the change, to the more ancient usage.

The last, and perhaps the strongest objection to representative Government which I shall consider, is founded on the difficulty of settling how the lay element in the proposed governing body shall be constituted ; in other words, who shall possess the Church franchise. This difficulty is undoubtedly a formidable one ; indeed, it is hardly susceptible of a perfectly satisfactory solution ; for in whichever way it be settled, by any particular class of persons, it is always open to another class to ask them—who gave you authority to settle it ? But this is not properly an objection : it is only a difficulty, and difficulties are made to be overcome. Although we may never arrive at a solution of the question which shall be logically satisfactory, we may get in a rough and approximate way at a settlement of it, which will be sufficient for all practical purposes. For example, a plan might be proposed by the highest authority in our Church—the Bishop, or Bishops,—involving a settlement of the franchise question ; and if that plan were accepted by the Clergy, and the great body of those who call themselves Churchmen, it will probably be thought that as near an approximation to the desideratum of a general assent as is necessary for practical purposes would be arrived at. For my own part, I am very anxious to have this question raised ; and though it is not strictly relevant to the matter in hand, and the discussion of it may appear premature, I will ask your indulgence

while I say a few words about it. After much and anxious reflection, I can see no proper qualification for a Church franchise but that of full communion; and I say this quite irrespectively of any doctrinal opinion about the nature and effects of that Holy Sacrament. I say it, because this qualification, or something strictly equivalent to it, is in consonance with invariable usage in the ancient Church, and also, indeed, in every Christian denomination, except our own, of which I ever heard. I say so, moreover, because we can have otherwise absolutely no guarantee that those who assume to legislate for the Church are even nominally Churchmen: still less, that they observe those laws, an observance of which all her members admit to be of the very essence of Churchmanship; and while I entertain what many would consider very democratic views about the participation of the laity in Church Government, it is a *sine qua non* with me that they should be Church laity. Now, it seems a contradiction in terms to say that a man is in communion with the Church who never communicates. The very word—Communion, as applied indiscriminately to Christian fellowship, and to participation in the LORD'S Supper, proves that the two ideas are, in the minds of Christians, identical. Indeed, I may be wrong, but I cannot help thinking that those who hold a different view in this matter either have hardly thought out the question, or are mainly actuated by what I conceive to be a mistaken view of expediency. Some of them fear that non-communicants would be offended; but, I must say, I think a man who deliberately and habitually abstains from Communion with the Church, is not one to whose opinions and feelings Church rules should be made subordinate. Others fear that a Communicant's franchise might lead to a profanation of the Sacrament. Have they inquired whether in other religious denominations, where conformity to religious ordinances is invariably required as a qualification for Church Government, any such profanatory effect is experienced or even suspected? The fact is, it would not really be worth a man's while, for the sake of so small an inducement, to be habitually guilty of so great a crime. But even if it were found, as is just possible, that such a rule might aggravate the guilt of a few abandoned individuals, ought we to place their supposed spiritual interests in competition with the welfare of the whole Church? Others, perhaps, have heard the maxim, that taxation involves representation, and think accordingly that every man who pays money for Church purposes has a right to participate in

Church Government. Have they considered how far this abstract proposition would lead them? Certain it is, that no political or religious community in the world ever admitted or acted on such a principle. No matter how far a nation may go in the direction of universal suffrage, it always stops short of making contribution to its revenue the sole qualification for political power. Women, children, idiots, convicts, aliens, may and generally do contribute to revenue, but they never enjoy its supposed correlative, that is power. Go and subscribe to a Wesleyan Meeting-house or a Presbyterian Church, and see whether your doing so will get you a vote for members of the next Conference or the next Assembly. You may reasonably make pecuniary contribution one qualification; but I cannot even conceive a proposal deliberately made that it should be the only one. On the other hand, I hardly think anyone will propose as permanent qualification for Church Government a simple statement of Church Membership. This again would be quite unheard of. No religious or political privilege was ever yet granted on the mere condition that a person claimed it—for it comes to that; there is always required some test of his sincerity; something that involves a question of fact upon which the claimant may be objected to, if he be not telling the truth. There remains to be considered the plan of a double franchise, *i.e.*, a statement of Church Membership, combined with a payment; and this is the franchise which has been apparently proposed for adoption in Wellington, and it may be said in South Australia also; for seat-renting involves in some degree a profession of Churchmanship as well as money payment. To this rule I object, in the first place that it does not secure the real Churchmanship of the governing body—and in the second, that pecuniary payment ought not to be mixed up with Church franchises at all. Wherever it is adopted the best Churchmen may be excluded because poor, while persons who are notoriously not Churchmen will have votes in Church matters and assist in making Church laws. On the whole, therefore, it does appear to me that no good reason can be assigned why the Church of England should adopt a more lax rule with respect to its franchises than any other ecclesiastical body. I trust you will pardon me for this digression (if it be one), and for having intruded my own view of this subject on you at so much length. My object in doing so is not to procure any expression of opinion on it—still less the adoption of any practical step by the meeting—

but merely to bring it before the mind of the public, in the sure hope that by full consideration and free discussion, the objects which we all have at heart will be best promoted.

I will conclude by saying that the practical step we propose to the meeting is merely to elect a corresponding committee, and to ascertain from the Bishop and the Churchmen of other settlements what it is that they are going to do. Whether it will be our business afterwards to go more into the details of a plan, or whether the Bishop will be pleased to draw out a plan, and invite our co-operation in it; whether we shall begin by petitioning Parliament, or, as I should much prefer, the Colonial Legislature, to make us a Corporation, or whether, like the people of South Australia, we shall endeavour to organize ourselves, and go on temporarily without being legally incorporated, will depend on the nature of the answer we receive. I only trust that now, having begun, we shall not let the matter drop; I trust we shall see that if our Churchmanship be not a sham, if we really take any interest in our Church, if we care as much about it as we should do about a joint stock company in which we had invested fifty pounds, we shall do, with respect to it, what as men of business we should do as a matter of course in a worldly case; we shall claim for the ecclesiastical society to which we belong a constitution and a government.







